

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 5, 2014

Secretary Tom Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to call for swift implementation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Livestock Disaster Programs authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill.


As you know, California plays a critical role in the U.S. cattle and dairy industry. As drought conditions in the state continue to escalate, expedient action is needed to protect this vital industry. With 55 of California's 58 counties experiencing severe drought conditions, and 53 counties classified as disaster areas by USDA, California ranchers are facing significant financial hardship. Assistance programs like the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) and the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) are critical to the survival of California's ranching families.

California ranchers have been forced to sell off herds of cattle to stem financial consequences of the drought. As natural forage disappears, ranchers are forced to buy expensive additional loads of hay and rely on the land's limited water resources. This has created a strong incentive to thin cattle herds. In January 2014, California's 101 Livestock Market Cattle Auction had a nearly ten-fold increase in the number of cattle being auctioned – from around 100 cattle a week to nearly 1,000.


LFP, LIP and other disaster relief programs were initially created through provisions in the 2008 Farm Bill on June 18, 2008. Following passage, program regulations and associated infrastructure took more than a year to begin accepting applications after initial passage. The only changes made to the programs through the 2014 Farm Bill included additional clauses to stave off duplicative payments. With only minor changes and an existing programmatic infrastructure, we expect the reauthorization of these programs to take substantially less time to implement.

We respectfully request a prompt response given the immediate need California's ranchers require in the face of catastrophic drought. Please provide a timeframe when program signups will be available, when payments can be expected, and the feasibility of expediting program implementation. We believe that with few changes made to the relief programs since 2008 and worsening drought conditions each day in our state, USDA should regard expediting these crucial relief programs with the highest priority.

We greatly appreciate your assistance and consideration.



Barbara Boxer  
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator